Reflections on Universal Monarchy in Europe

(1734)

Réflexions sur la monarchie universelle en Europe, text by Françoise Weil (*OC* II, 339–364). Montesquieu's original plan was to include this essay in the first edition of *Romans* (1734). Fearing the reaction of Louis XV's censors to his negative comments regarding France, however, he withdrew it from publication. No manuscript is extant; the *OC* text, which this translation follows, reproduces the text of the single printed copy of 1734 now owned by the municipal library of Bordeaux (MS 2511). It was first published in *Deux opuscules de Montesquieu* (Bordeaux and Paris: G. Gounouilhou, 1891).

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I

It is legitimate to ask whether, given the present state of Europe, it might happen that one nation could acquire a lasting superiority over the others, as the Romans did.

I believe that such a thing has become all but impossible, for the following reasons.

New discoveries in war have equalized the strength of all individuals and consequently of all nations.

74 John Law and Giulio Alberoni. The Italian Giulio Alberoni (1664–1752) rose to substantial power and influence in the Spain of Philip V (1683–1746), becoming a duke and member of the king's council prior to appointment as cardinal by pope Clement XI in 1717. Alberoni strongly supported Spanish attempts to regain lost territory in Italy, which led to the formation, in 1718, of the Quadruple Alliance against Spain between Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the Austrians. This in turn prompted Alberoni to attempt to splinter the Anglo-French Alliance by devising the Cellamare conspiracy. After France had easily quashed that conspiracy and then invaded Spain, as did England, Alberoni was dismissed from office in 1719 and expelled from Spain.

The law of nations has changed, and because of today's laws war is conducted in such a way that it ruins first and foremost those who have the greatest advantages.

Formerly, it was the practice to destroy the cities one had taken; the lands were sold, and much worse, all the inhabitants. The sacking of a city provided pay for an army and a successful campaign enriched a conqueror. Now that such barbarities are rightly regarded with horror, states ruin themselves capturing strongholds that surrender, which one maintains, and which more often than not are abandoned.

Romans in their triumphs[75] carried to Rome all the wealth of the conquered nations. Today, victories confer only sterile laurels.

When a monarch sends an army into an enemy country, he sends with it a portion of his treasury to support it. He enriches the country he has begun to conquer and very often enables it to drive him out.

Luxury has increased and given our armies needs which they ought not to have. Nothing aided Holland more in sustaining the great wars she has waged than the commerce she has been able to conduct in provisioning her armies, those of her allies and even those of her enemies.

Today war is waged with so many men that a people constantly at war would inevitably exhaust itself.

In the past, princes sought armies in order to lead them to fight in another country. Now we seek countries where we can lead armies to fight.

II

Moreover, there are specific reasons why prosperity can nowhere be permanent in Europe and why there must be continual fluctuation in the power that, in the other three parts of the world, is more or less fixed.

At present, Europe conducts all the commerce and shipping of the whole world. Now, depending on the smaller or larger role a state takes in this shipping or commerce, its power must increase or diminish. But since it is in the nature of such things to change continually and to depend on a plethora of chance factors, especially on the wisdom of each government, it happens that a state which appears to be victorious abroad is ruining itself at home, while states that remain neutral are increasing their strength, or conquered nations are regaining theirs. And decline begins especially at the time of the

75 Triumphs were authorized at the discretion of the senate in recognition of military victories involving at least 5,000 enemy casualties. The victorious commander entered Rome in a chariot drawn by four horses, wearing a purple toga embroidered in gold and a laurel crown.

greatest successes that cannot be achieved or maintained except by violent means.

It is characteristic of powers based on commerce and industry that they are limited by their very prosperity. A large amount of gold and silver in a state, which causes everything to become more expensive, results in artisans being paid more for the luxuries they produce, and other nations can sell their goods at a lower price.

In former times, a poor nation might be in an advantageous position. Here is why.

Since cities used only their own citizens in their wars, the armies of rich cities were made up of men ruined by ease, idleness, and pleasures. Consequently, they were often destroyed by the armies of their neighbors who, being accustomed to a hard and demanding life, were more fit for war and for the military exercises of those times. But things are different now that soldiers, who are the basest part of every nation, are all equal with respect to luxury, military exercises no longer demand the same strength and skill as before, and it is easier to produce disciplined troops.

Often a poor people would become formidable to all the others because it was warlike, and because emerging from nowhere, it appeared suddenly at full strength to confront a nation whose strength lay only in the respect in which it was held. But now that all civilized nations are, so to speak, members of one great republic, it is wealth that creates power, there being no nation today that enjoys advantages that a richer one cannot almost always obtain.

But with wealth continually fluctuating, so, too, does power. And whatever success a conquering state may attain, there is always a certain reaction that reduces it to its former condition.

III

If we review history, we will see that it is not wars that for four hundred years have produced the great changes in Europe, but marriages, rights of succession, treaties and edicts; in short it is by civil transactions that Europe changes and has changed.

IV

Many have noted that fewer lives are lost in battle now than in the past, which is to say that wars are less decisive.

I shall offer one very extraordinary reason, which is that the infantry no longer carry any defensive weapons. In the past they had such

cumbersome ones that when their army was defeated, they would immediately abandon them so they could flee;[76] that is why we read in the history books about armies fleeing and not armies retreating.

In combat, the lightly armed were delivered to slaughter by the heavily armed; in defeat, the heavily armed were exterminated by the lightly armed.

V

Plans which require considerable time to be carried out hardly ever succeed. Changes of fortune, the inconstancy of minds, the diversity of passions, constant changes in circumstances, and differences in motives give rise to all kinds of obstacles.

Monarchies in particular suffer the disadvantage of being governed sometimes with the public good in mind and sometimes in light of private interests and follow by turns the interests of favorites, ministers, and kings.

Now conquests take more time today than in the past and have become proportionately more difficult.

VI

It is clear that the situation here is more stable than in ancient times. The Spanish monarchy in the wars of Philip III[77] against France was unsuccessful in twenty-five campaigns, but Spain lost only a small piece of a remote province. The least populous people in Europe[78] at that time sustained a war against her for fifty years with neither side having the advantage, and in our own times we have seen a monarch, weakened by the cruelest possible wounds he could receive at Höchstädt, Turin, Ramillies, Barcelona, Oudenarde, and Lille,[79] shore up the continual prosperity of his enemies without his greatness being significantly diminished.

There is no parallel in antiquity to a frontier like the one Louis XIV carved out along the Flemish border where he placed three lines of fortifications to protect the most exposed part of his territories.[80]

76 See the whole history of Livy. (M)

77 Philip III (1578–1621), king of Spain from 1598.

78 I.e., the people of the Netherlands, who revolted against Spanish rule in 1566 and waged intermittent war with Spain until a truce was arranged in 1609. The independence of the Dutch republic was formally recognized in the treaties of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years' War in 1648.

79 Louis XIV's armies sustained those severe defeats during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714).

80 The so-called "belt of iron" was designed by Sébastian Le Prestre de Vauban (1653–1707), appointed General Commissioner of Fortifications by Louis XIV in 1688. Montesquieu owned Vauban's *Testament politique* (*Catalogue* 2442).

VII

Nowadays we are constantly imitating one another. If Prince Maurice[81] learns the art of siege, we quickly master it too. Does Coëhorn[82] change his approach? We change ours. If some people makes use of a new weapon, all the other nations are suddenly trying it. Does a state increase the size of its army, or impose a new tax? It is a warning to the others to do the same. Finally, when Louis XIV borrows from his subjects, the English and the Dutch borrow from theirs.

In Persia, it took a very long time for the court to learn that Tissaphernes[83] had rebelled. Polybius tells us that kings did not know whether the government of Rome was aristocratic or popular; and when Rome ruled the world, Pharnaces,[84] who offered his daughter to Caesar, did not know whether the Romans could have barbarians as wives or if they could have more than one.

VIII

Large empires have always been characteristic of Asia; in Europe they have never been sustainable. This is because the Asia that we know has larger plains and is divided into larger units by its mountains and seas. And since Asia is more southerly, the rivers are less swollen and thus form smaller barriers.[85]

A large empire necessarily supposes despotic authority in the one who governs; decisions must be made promptly to compensate for the distances over which they must be conveyed; fear must prevent negligence[86] on the part of the distant governor or magistrate; law must originate from a single person so that it will constantly change like the unexpected events that always multiply in a state in proportion to its size.[87]

Were that not the case,[88] such monarchies would be dismembered and the different peoples, weary of a rule they would consider alien, would begin to live under their own laws.

81 Prince Maurice of Nassau (1567–1625), stadtholder of Holland from 1585.
82 Menno van Coëhorn (1641–1704), known as "the Vauban of Holland" as a result of his brilliance at constructing fortifications.
83 Tissaphernes (445–395 BCE) was a Persian satrap executed for treason for treating with both sides in the Peloponnesian war.
84 Pharnaces II (c. 97–47 BCE) was the son of Mithridates VI Eupator (135–63) of Pontus. During the civil war between Caesar and Pompey he sought independence for his kingdom of Bosphorus, but was defeated by Caesar at Zera in 47 BCE.
85 There is less snow on the mountains there. (M)
86 In a vast empire there must be large armies always distant, often not completely known to the Prince. (M)
87 Included in the *Laws*. (M): see *SL* VIII, 19.
88 The example of the Spanish monarchy does not contradict what I am saying for the states of Italy and Flanders were governed by their laws and were rewarded for their

Power will therefore always be despotic in Asia because if servitude were not extreme, partition would at once result, which the nature of the country cannot allow.

In Europe natural divisions form several medium-sized states in which the rule of law is not incompatible with the preservation of the state; on the contrary such lawful rule is so conducive to preservation that without it the state sinks into decline and becomes inferior to all the others.

That is what forms, from age to age and perpetually through the centuries a spirit of liberty that makes it difficult to subjugate and subject any part to a foreign power except by laws and the benefits of commerce.

In Asia, on the contrary, there prevails a spirit of servitude that has always been there, and in all the histories of that region it is impossible to find a single action that indicates a free soul.[89]

IX

Since the destruction of the Romans in the West, there have been several occasions when Europe seemed destined to revert to control by a single hand.

X

After the French had subjugated several previously existing barbarian nations, Charlemagne founded[90] a large empire, but that action itself divided Europe up again into an endless number of sovereign units.

When the barbarians established themselves, each leader founded a kingdom, that is, a large independent fief, which had power over several others.[91] The conqueror's army was governed on the plan of the government of their country, and the conquered country on the plan of the government of their army.

The reason why they established this sort of government is that they knew of no other, and if by chance a Gothic or Germanic prince of that

dependency by the immense sums that the Spanish expended there, and the Indies are held fast by a particular kind of chain. (M)

89 Cf. *SL* XVII, 6.

90 This Prince subjugated part of the Empire, but he was stopped in Spain, in Italy, in the North; a portion of his own states were never completely subdued; having no sea forces, he did not extend his conquest to islands. (M) Charlemagne (742–814), king of the Franks from 768 and of the Lombards from 774, crowned Emperor of the Romans on Christmas Day 800 by pope Leo III.

91 In 843, following a three-year civil war, the Carolingian empire, ruled between 814 and 840 by Charlemagne's only surviving son, Louis the Pious (778–840), was divided into three parts by the Treaty of Verdun, each of Louis's sons (Lothair, Pepin, and Louis) receiving a portion.

day had taken it into his head to talk of arbitrary power, or supreme authority, or unlimited power, his whole army would have mocked him.[92]

Now, for the reasons we have mentioned a great empire where the prince did not have absolute authority would necessarily become divided, either because the provincial governors did not obey, or because, in order to make them better obey, it was necessary to divide the empire into several kingdoms.[93]

Such is the origin of the kingdoms of France, Italy, Germania, and Aquitaine, and of all the territorial divisions that took place in those times.

When titles and fiefs were established in perpetuity, it was impossible for the great princes to enlarge their territory through their vassals, who would come to their aid only to defend themselves and would conquer only to divide up the spoils.

XI

The Normans, having made themselves masters of the sea, penetrated inland along the river estuaries, and although they did not conquer Europe, they almost destroyed it.[94]

They were given the finest province of western France; their duke William conquered England,[95] which became the center of power of the Norman kings, and of the proud Plantagenets who followed them.

The kings of England were soon the most powerful princes of those times; they held the finest provinces in France, and their victories promised them the imminent conquest of all the others.

We must not judge the strength of the different countries of Europe in the past by what they presently possess. It was not actually the size and wealth of a kingdom which determined its power but the size of the prince's domain. The kings of England, who enjoyed very large revenues, accomplished very great things, while the kings of France, who had greater vassals, were for a long time more harassed than helped by them.

When armies made a conquest, the lands were shared between them and the overlords,[96] but the more time elapsed since the conquest, the more they had been able to despoil the kings by usurpations, gifts, and indemnities; and since the Normans were the last conquerors, king William, who retained his

92 Cf. *Pensées* 699. 93 Cf. *SL* VIII, 17. 94 Cf. *SL* XXXI, 10.
95 William the Conqueror (1027–1087), Duke of Normandy, was crowned king of England in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1066.
96 *Chefs*.

former domain along with what he received from the new division, was the richest prince in Europe.[97]

But when we in France realized that it was more a question of wearing down the English than of conquering them, when we gave ourselves time to profit from their internal divisions, when we began to doubt the value of battles, to understand that our infantry was weak and that we would have to fight hard, we changed our fortunes as well as our tactics; and since we were always near and they always distant, they were soon confined to their island, and realizing the futility of their former ambitions they thought only of enjoying the prosperity they could always have had, but had not yet known.

XII

There was a time when it would not have been impossible for the popes to become the sole monarchs of Europe.

I avow that it was a miracle of circumstances that allowed the pontiffs, who were not even sovereigns of their city, suddenly to acquire secular as well as spiritual power and drive from Italy the Emperors both Eastern and Western.

In order to become masters of Rome they made her free, taking advantage of the war that some Eastern Emperors were waging against icons to free her from allegiance to them.[98]

Charlemagne, who had taken Lombardy, to which the Eastern Emperors had pretensions, gave sovereignty over some lands to the popes, natural enemies of those Emperors, to create a barrier against them.

It was also fortunate that the seat of the Western Empire was transferred to the Germanic kingdom and that the kingdom of Italy remained joined to it. The Emperors were soon regarded as foreigners in Italy, and the popes were able to take up that country's defense against the invasion of foreigners.

Other circumstances conspired to extend the power of the Papacy in all directions: the dread of excommunications, the weakness of the great princes, the proliferation of small ones, and the need Europe often had of being united under a single leader.

In the court there was less ignorance than anywhere else, and as their judgments were equitable, they attracted everyone to their court, like

97 His revenues rose to 1061 pounds sterling per day. Oderici Vitalis, Book I. (M) Oderic Vitalis (1075–c. 1142), *Gesta Normannorum ducum* ("Deeds of the Norman Dukes").

98 In 730 the Eastern Roman Emperor Leo III (717–741) decreed that all religious icons be destroyed, and this policy alienated Western Christians, including pope Gregory III (731–741), who decreed that anyone destroying icons would be excommunicated.

Dejoces,[99] of whom we hear it said that he obtained sovereignty and empire over the Medes on account of the justice of his rule.

But the length of the schisms,[100] during which the Papacy seemed to be struggling with itself and was continually degraded by various rivals, whose only aim was staying in power, contained it where it could be limited.

XIII

Judging by the accounts[101] of certain monks who were sent by pope Innocent IV[102] in the mid-thirteenth century to the sons of Genghis Khan,[103] it was feared in those times[104] that Europe would be conquered by the Tatars. Those peoples, after conquering the Orient, had invaded Russia, Hungary, and Poland, where they had wreaked havoc.

One law of Genghis Khan ordered them to conquer the whole world. They always kept five large armies in readiness, and they engaged in sustained military expeditions of twenty-five or thirty years' duration. Sometimes they held out against a stronghold for ten or twelve years, and if they ran short of food, they eliminated some of their own men in order to feed those who remained. They always sent an advance guard of troops to kill all the men they encountered. The peoples who resisted them were put to death, and those who capitulated were enslaved. They separated out the artisans to use for their military engineering, and they made the rest into a militia that they exposed to every danger. They employed every known ruse to rid themselves of the princes and nobility of the countries they wished to subdue. In short, their system was quite well designed: they never pardoned deserters or soldiers who indulged in pillage before the enemy was totally defeated, and contrary to the usual custom of the time, their leaders concentrated on every

99 Dejoces was a priest and village judge who, according to Herodotus, was elected the first king of the Medes in the late eighth or early seventh century BCE.

100 A schism between Eastern and Western churches erupted in 1054 over the source of the Holy Spirit and whether leavened bread should be used in the eucharist. During the Great Schism (1378–1417), two popes, Gregory XII and Benedict XIII, were elected, and then a third; it ended when Martin V was elected pope at the Council of Constance in 1417.

101 See the relation of brother Jean du Plan Carpin, and the history of Genghis Khan by Pétis de la Croix. (M) I.e., Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, *Relation des voyages en Tartarie* (Paris, 1634), and François Pétis de la Croix's *Vie de Genghis Khan* ("Life of Genghis Khan") (1710).

102 Innocent IV, pope from 1243 to 1254, sent a message in 1245 via Pian del Carpine to the emperor of the Tatars imploring him to convert to Christianity and cease threatening Europe.

103 Genghis Khan (1162–1227), founder of the Mongol empire.

104 All the more so because Europe was divided into an infinite number of sovereign parts. (M)

detail of the action and never took part in the fighting. They had good defensive and offensive weapons, and they had the same speed, the same lightness, the same talent for ravaging a country and for escaping the armies that were defending it, as the present-day European Tatars have. In short, they were fearsome in an age when there were few regular armies.

But since Europe was covered with castles and fortified cities, the Tatars failed to make any significant progress; and having quarreled among themselves they were about to be exterminated[105] by the Russians. Mahomet II[106] gave them the Crimea where they were confined to ravaging their neighbors, which they still do.

XIV

After conquering the East, the Turks threatened the West, but fortunately, instead of continuing their thrust through southern Europe, where they could have imperiled it, they attacked from the north, which for them was unconquerable.

All the histories show that it is very difficult for southern nations to conquer northern ones, as especially shown by the Romans, always busy combatting them and pushing them beyond the Danube and the Rhine.[107]

The first enemy of southern nations in the north is the climate; horses cannot survive it and men, overwhelmed by suffering, can no longer envisage glorious endeavors and are preoccupied only by their own self-preservation.

Besides these general reasons, there are particular ones which prevent the Turks from being able to make conquests in the north; they drink only water, and they have customs and fasts which prevent them from holding out for long and which a cold climate cannot support.

Thus the Arabs conquered only the countries of the south.

XV

As the government of the Goths gradually became weaker, either from the inevitable corruption of all governments, or from the establishment of well-trained armies, sovereign authority imperceptibly replaced feudal authority in Europe; then, more independent princes kept all they acquired either by conquest, by thievery, or by marriage. France had the good fortune to inherit

105 I am speaking of those who had subjugated Capchak. (M)
106 Sultan Mahomet Fateh II (1432–1481), who conquered Constantinople in 1453.
107 Cf. *Pensées* 545.

large fiefs. Castile and Aragon united their kingdoms,[108] and the House of Austria[109] used the empire to confiscate very large provinces for its benefit.

The fortune of this house became prodigious. Charles V succeeded to Burgundy, Castile, and Aragon. He attained empire, and by a new form of greatness the known world expanded and a New World came into being under his rule.[110]

But France, which everywhere separated Charles V's territories, and which, being in the middle of Europe, was its heart not to say its head, was the center around which rallied all the princes who wanted to defend their dying liberty.

Francis I,[111] who did not have the numerous provinces which the crown has since acquired, and who was the victim of a misfortune which cost him everything, even his personal liberty,[112] nevertheless continued to be Charles's perpetual rival, and although by his own decree the laws had put limits on his power, he was not thereby weakened because arbitrary power indeed induces people to make greater, but less enduring, efforts.

XVI[113]

What most intimidated Europe was a new kind of strength that seemed to accrue to the House of Austria. She imported such a prodigious quantity of gold and silver from the newly discovered world that the amounts previously possessed seemed minute in comparison.

But what no one could have foreseen is that poverty caused her to fail almost everywhere. Philip II,[114] who succeeded Charles V, had to declare himself bankrupt, as everyone knows, and there has scarcely ever been any prince who has had to put up with more complaints, insolence, and insubordination from his chronically ill-paid troops.

From then on, the Spanish monarchy was in a continual state of decline, the reason for which was that there was an inherent physical

108 By the marriage in 1469 of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile.

109 I.e., the Habsburgs, Holy Roman Emperors from 1438 to 1740.

110 Charles V (1500–1558), grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella, was elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1519 and inherited rule over Spain and the Spanish empire, including the Netherlands, Austria, the Duchy of Burgundy, and South American territories. See also *SL* XXI, 21.

111 Francis I (1494–1547), king of France from 1515.

112 The armies of Charles V captured Francis at Pavia in Italy in 1525 and imprisoned him in Madrid. He was able to secure his release only by signing the Treaty of Madrid ceding significant French territory to Charles.

113 Much of the content of Article XVI is also present in *Considerations on the Wealth of Spain*; see also *SL* XXI, 22.

114 Philip II (1527–1598), king of Spain from 1556.

defect in the nature of its riches, which made them futile, and which increased by the day.

Everyone knows that gold and silver are only a fictional or symbolic wealth. Since these signs are very durable and are little eroded by use, as befits their nature, the more common they become, the more they fall in value, because they represent fewer things.

The misfortune of the Spanish was that, because they conquered Mexico and Peru, they left aside their natural wealth in order to obtain this symbolic wealth that loses its value. At the time of the conquest, gold and silver were very rare in Europe, and Spain, suddenly the possessor of a very great quantity of these metals, developed ambitions that she had never had before. The riches that were found in the conquered countries, however, were not proportional to those of her mines. The Indians hid some of it; moreover, since these peoples made use of gold and silver only to enhance the magnificence of the temples of the gods and the palaces of kings, they did not seek precious metals with the same lust that we do. Finally, they did not know the technique of extracting metal from all the mines, but only from those where the separation is made by fire, not knowing the use of mercury and perhaps unfamiliar with mercury itself.

Meanwhile, there was soon double the quantity of silver in Europe, which was evident in that the price of everything on the market was just about doubled.

The Spanish scoured the mines, hollowed out the mountains, and invented machines to extract water, crush the ore and extract the metal; and since they cared nothing for the lives of the Indians, they forced them to work pitilessly; silver soon doubled again in Europe, and the profit was again lower by half for Spain, which each year had only the same quantity of a metal that had become less precious by half.

In twice the time silver doubled again, and the profit again shrank by half.

It even shrank by more than half. Here is why.

To extract the gold from the mines, process it as needed, and ship it to Europe, required a given outlay. I will assume it was as 1 to 64; when the silver had once doubled, and consequently was half as precious, the expense was as 2 to 64. Thus the fleets that bore the same quantity of gold to Spain bore something which in reality was worth one-half less, and cost one-half more.

If we follow the matter from one doubling to the next, we will find the progression of the cause of the powerlessness of the wealth of Spain.

The mines of the Indies have been worked for about two hundred years. I will assume that the quantity of silver presently in the commercial world,

compared to the quantity there was before the discovery, is 32 to 1; in other words, it has doubled five times. In two hundred years, the same quantity again will be, compared to what there was before the discovery, as 64 is to 1; in other words, it will again double. Now at present fifty[115] hundredweight of gold ore yield four, five, or six ounces of gold, and when there are only two, the miner recovers only his costs. In two hundred years, when there are only four ounces, the miner will again recover only his costs. Thus there will be little profit to be made on gold.

Were one to discover mines so rich that they yield more profit, the richer they are, the sooner the profit will cease.

It will perhaps be argued that the mines of Germany and Hungary, the revenues of which little exceed the costs, are still very useful in that, being situated in the countries themselves, they employ several thousand men who consume agricultural surplus and are thus a kind of national manufactory.

The difference is that working the mines of Germany and Hungary stimulates agriculture, whereas working those run by the Spanish destroys it.

The Indies and Spain are two powers under a single master but the Indies are the principal one, and Spain is only the accessory. It is in vain that politics tries to reinstate the principal one as the accessory: the Indies still draw Spain to themselves.

Of fifty million in merchandise that goes every year to the Indies, Spain furnishes only two and a half million; the Indies are thus doing a trade of fifty million, and Spain two and a half million.

Wealth that is an accidental tribute and owes nothing to a nation's industry, to the number of its inhabitants, or to its agriculture, is a bad kind of wealth. The king of Spain, who receives large sums from his customs house in Cadiz, is in this respect just a very rich individual in a very poor state.

Everything takes place between foreigners and him with his subjects playing hardly any role at all and is independent of his kingdom's good or ill fortune.

And if a few provinces in Castile gave him a sum like that of the customs house in Cadiz, his power would be much greater; his wealth could only result from the country's wealth; these provinces would drive all the others, and all together they would be in a better position to sustain their respective burdens.

The king of Spain has only a great treasury, but he would have a great people.

115 See the Voyages of Frézier. (M) Amédée François Frézier, *Relation du voyage de la mer du Sud* ("Relation of the voyage to the Southern Sea") (Paris, 1714) (*Catalogue* 2742).

XVII

The enemies of a great prince[116] who reigned in our day have accused him a thousand times, based rather on their fears than on their reasoning, of having fashioned and implemented the project of universal monarchy. If he had succeeded in that, nothing would have been more fatal to Europe, to his former subjects, to himself, and to his family. Heaven, which knows what is truly advantageous, better served him through his defeats than it would have done through victories, and instead of making him the sole king of Europe, favored him more by making him the most powerful king of all.[117]

Even if he had won the famous battle where he received his first setback,[118] far from the project being completed, it would barely have begun;[119] he would have had to stretch his forces and his frontiers even further. Germany, which was hardly taking part in the war except by supplying mercenaries, would have entered the fray on its own; the North would have risen up; all the neutral powers would have taken sides, and his allies could have perceived their interests differently.

The character of the French is such that when they are in a foreign country, they think only of what they have left behind; when they leave France on a military expedition, they see glory as the ultimate good and, when they are abroad, they see it as an obstacle to their returning home; they become hated abroad as a result of their good qualities, because these qualities are always accompanied by scorn; they can brave danger and wounds, but they cannot face losing their pleasures; they know how to achieve military success but not how to profit from it; when they are defeated, they abandon everything rather than losing only what they have to lose; they always do very well half of what is necessary, and they sometimes do the other half very badly; they are incorrigibly light-hearted and forget they have lost a battle as soon as they have extolled the general. In short they would never have pursued the conquest of Europe to its end, because if such an enterprise fails in one place, it will fail everywhere, or if it fails at one time, it will fail forever.

XVIII

Europe has become just one nation composed of many; France and England need the opulence of Poland and Muscovy, just as each of their provinces

116 Louis XIV. 117 Cf. *SL* IX, 7.
118 Höchstädt (1704), known in England as the Battle of Blenheim. 119 Cf. *Pensées* 562.

needs the others;[120] and a state that imagines it increases its power by ruining its neighbor, as a rule, weakens itself along with them.

XIX[121]

The true strength of a prince does not lie in his ability to conquer, but in the difficulty of attacking him and, if I dare put it this way, in the immutability of his position; but the enlargement of monarchies only serves to make them reveal new sides by which they may be taken. Look, for instance, at the neighbors Muscovy has just given herself: Persia, China,[122] and Japan. She has made herself the boundary of these empires whereas she used to be happily separated from them by vast open spaces. And so it has occurred since these new conquests that the ordinary revenues[123] of the state have no longer been able to sustain it.

XX[124]

If a state is to be at full strength, its size must be such that there is a relation between the speed with which some undertaking can be launched against it and the haste it can summon to repel it. Since the invader may initially appear anywhere, the defender must likewise be able to position itself anywhere, and consequently the state must be of moderate extent so that it will be commensurate to the degree of speed nature has given men for moving from one place to another.

France and Spain are exactly the requisite size. Their forces interact so well that they quickly move to where they are needed; the armies join their forces and move swiftly from one border to another and they fear none of the things that require more than a few days to carry out.

France by wonderful good fortune has her capital closer to certain frontiers than to others, exactly in proportion to their vulnerability, and the prince is better able to maintain vigilance over each part of the country to the extent it is most exposed.

XXI[125]

But when a vast state, such as Persia, is attacked, it takes several months for the scattered troops to assemble, and a forced march such as would be workable over a week's time would be unthinkable. If the army that is on the border is defeated, it is inevitably dispersed because its redoubts are not close at hand; the

120 Cf. *Pensées* 318. 121 Cf. *SL* IX, 6. 122 She had already made China her neighbor. (M)
123 Among other taxes, one has just been established for one-eighth of all the empire's assets. (M)
124 Cf. *SL* IX, 6. 125 Cf. *SL* IX, 6.

conquering army, finding no resistance, advances in long days' marches, shows up before the capital and lays siege to it, almost before the governors of the provinces can be alerted to send relief. Those who judge the revolution imminent hasten it by failing to obey, for men who are loyal only because punishment is at hand are no longer loyal when it is distant; they work to advance their own private interests; the empire dissolves, the capital is taken, and the conqueror fights with the governors for control of the provinces.

XXII

China also is a vast country and like her is densely populated; if the rice harvest fails, gangs of three, four, or five bandits form in many places in different provinces in order to pillage. Most of them are exterminated in short order; others gain adherents and are still destroyed. But, with such a large number of provinces so distant from one another, it can happen that some gang will achieve success, survive, gain strength, turn into a proper army, and make straight for the capital where its leader claims the throne.[126]

XXIII

In Louis XIV's last war,[127] when our armies and those of our enemies were in Spain, far from their own country, some things nearly occurred which are almost unheard of in Europe, namely that the two generals in concert were on the point of out-maneuvering all the monarchs of Europe and stunning them by their sheer audacity and the singularity of their undertakings.[128]

XXIV

If great conquests are so difficult, so useless, so futile, and so dangerous, how should one speak of this malady of our times which makes every state maintain an inordinate number[129] of troops? The disease worsens and necessarily becomes contagious since, as soon as one state increases what it calls its strength, the others immediately increase theirs, so that nothing is gained thereby except the common ruin. Each monarch keeps in a state of readiness all the armies he might need if his peoples were threatened with

126 Cf. *SL* VIII, 21. 127 The War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714).

128 The French general, Louis Joseph de Bourbon, Duke of Vendôme (1654–1712), nearly came to an agreement with the Austrian general Guido Wald Rüdiger, count of Starhemberg (1657–1737), named Supreme Commander of the Austrians in Spain in 1708, to restore Philip V to the throne of Spain, later achieved in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713).

129 We are in a very different situation from that of the Romans who were disarming others to the extent that they were arming themselves. (M)

extermination, and we call peace[130] this straining of all against all. Thus Europe is ruined to such an extent that if three private individuals were in the same situation as the three wealthiest powers in this part of the world, they would have nothing to live on. We are poor with the wealth and trade of the whole world, and soon, by dint of having so many soldiers, we will have nothing but soldiers and will be like the Tatars.[131]

The great princes, not satisfied with buying the troops of the less powerful ones, seek to purchase alliances wherever they can; in other words they almost always squander their money.

The result of such a situation is that taxes are constantly being increased, and what rules out all future remedies is that states no longer rely on their revenues, but wage war with their capital. It is not unheard of for states to mortgage themselves even in times of peace, employing emergency measures that ruin them, measures so extreme that even the most prodigal son would scarcely be able to imagine them for himself.

XXV

Oriental monarchs are remarkable in that they raise nowadays only the same taxes as the founder of their monarchy used to raise. They make their peoples pay only what their fathers have told their children they themselves have paid. Since they enjoy a great surplus, many of them issue[132] edicts only to exempt one province of their empire each year from paying taxes. Their will is usually manifested through acts of generosity, but in Europe the princes' edicts are usually considered grievous even before we have seen them because they always refer to their needs and never to our own.

Oriental monarchs[133] are rich because their expenditures never increase, and they never increase because they never do anything new, or if they do, they prepare their plans well in advance: admirable slow planning that leads to prompt execution. Thus the pain passes quickly, and the benefit remains for a long time. They believe they have done quite well by preserving what was done before; they spend on projects whose end is in sight, and nothing on projects just begun. In

130 It is true that it is this condition of exertion which principally maintains the equilibrium because it exhausts the great powers. (M)

131 All it will take to get there is to put enough emphasis on the newly invented militias and take them to the same excess as we have the standing armies. (M)

132 That is the custom of the emperors of China. (M)

133 It is not my purpose in all this to praise the government of Asian peoples, but their climate; I even concede that they go to the opposite extreme, which is an unpardonable lack of concern. (M)

brief, those who govern the state do not torment it because they do not torment themselves.

It is clear from what I have just said that I am not talking about any particular European government; these remarks are applicable to all.

Iliacos intra muros peccatur et extra.[134]

* * *

134 "There are mistakes within the walls of Ilion and without" (Horace, *Epistles*, 1, 2, 16).
135 Charles XII (1682–1718), king from 1697.
136 Charles Martin (1433–1477), known as Charles the Bold, was Duke of Burgundy from 1466.
137 Augustus II (1670–1733), Polish king dethroned by Charles XII in 1704 and restored in 1709 by Peter the Great of Russia.
138 Louis XI (1423–1483), king of France from 1461.
139 Charles XII's defeat at Poltava in 1709 by the combined forces of Denmark, Norway, Saxony, Poland, Lithuania, and Russia, ended the Great Northern War and presaged the collapse of the Swedish empire.
140 At the Battle of Morat on 22 June 1476, Charles the Bold, facing Swiss and Lorraine forces, lost a third of his army and ceased to pose a threat to Louis XI.